Different Dreams:
An Examination of America' and Japan's National Characters

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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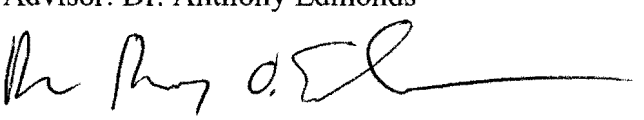

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Abstract

When trying to distinguish what makes a member of one society different from an individual of another, the idea of national character often assumes a prominent role in the discussion. National character is the set of values that one culture treasures as the most important to the majority of individuals in that nation. This paper examines the American and Japanese national characters and looks at the fundamental dissimilarities between the two. In the United States, the definition of who is an American is based on whether or not the person appreciates the American Dream. As opposed the individualistic outlook that this ideal promotes, the Japanese share a sense of duty and view the group as the basis for society. The contrast between these two views is clearly seen in the societies' reactions to national tragedies. To analyze this theory, I use the public's responses to the Oklahoma City bombing and the Tokyo subway sarin attacks as case studies.

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Introduction

If the average American were to travel to Japan without any preparations, he would more than likely experience a great deal of confusion. Everyone around him would seem to bow or apologize constantly, and he would have no idea where to sit at a business meeting or what to do if he were invited over to a Japanese home. Even if this individual does know some basic Japanese customs, he probably does not understand why he participates in these rituals. Recently, the Internet and profusion of Japanese films, particularly anime, have caused an increase in exposure to Japanese culture, but the majority of Americans do not fully comprehend this Asian society. Likewise, the Japanese have some idea of what the United States is like through the images seen in Hollywood films and in English classes. In general, the Japanese know more about American culture than the Americans know about the Japanese lifestyles. Despite this fact, the Japanese continue to have difficulty recognizing the reasoning behind certain American behaviors.

Through a comparison of the national characters of both the United States and Japan, this analysis hopes to allow both cultures to gain a better appreciation of the foundation of the other's society. Instead of trying to directly contrast the ideals of these societies, this comparison is conducted through a look at two similar experiences. In 1995, both the United States and Japan experienced a domestic terrorist attack. Through an inspection of the reactions of America to the Oklahoma City bombing and Japan to the Tokyo subway attacks, the reader can gain an understanding of how these national characteristics influence the behavior of the public. Immediate responses to major disasters are often indicative of that society's character.

Of course, these national characteristics are traditional ideals. Neither country is likely to fully live up to these dreams, or have a citizen who completely embodies these principles. Rather, these traits provide an identity that the nation continually strives to achieve. Since society changes so rapidly in the modern age with the increasing interconnectivity with the world, it is impossible to define exactly what America' and Japan's dreams are as of today. While they have altered some from what is described in this study, the basic principles remain the same. These idyllic characteristics have existed in essence since the foundation of the United States and the beginning of the Meiji Era in Japan.

Comparing how America reacted to the Oklahoma City bombing to the manner in which Japan responded to the Tokyo subway attack reveals how these nations' character is reflected in their actions. To provide a basis for this comparison, this paper examines the tragedies of the Oklahoma City bombing and Tokyo sarin attack, along with their nation's responses. Then, to help clarify any confusion over the term "national character," this paper presents a definition of the phrase. With the meaning of this important expression established an analysis of the American Dream and the values that it incorporates follows. The study then scrutinizes the Japanese national ideologies. Finally, this study provides a comparison of the reactions to these domestic terrorist attacks to demonstrate what these societal attributes look like when translated into behavior.

Oklahoma City Bombing

On April 19, 1995, the unthinkable occurred in the United States. Timothy McVeigh drove a truck into the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, detonated a bomb that he left on the first floor, and fled before the building exploded. At 9:02, when the explosive went off, America witnessed the worst terrorist attack on its own soil to that time. After the massive amount of debris was examined, the death count rose to 168 people, including 19 children, and hundreds more were injured. The Oklahoma City Bombing transformed April 19 from an ordinary day to one of infamy.

As a result of his strong dislike of the government and his involvement with the militia culture in the United States, Timothy McVeigh decided to focus his anger at the Murrah Building on that specific date. Exactly two years prior to the attack, the FBI attacked the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, killing eighty. On the same day of the Oklahoma City bombing, Richard Snell, a known member of a militia terrorist organization, was executed for committing two racially motivated murders. Also, on April 19, 1992, the FBI began their siege of Ruby Ridge, a blockade that resulted in the deaths of the wife and child of a well-known white supremacist, Randy Weaver.[1] Believing that the American government was attempting to eradicate these groups of people who want to "protect" the country from any unclean influences, Timothy McVeigh was convinced that the only way to stop these attacks was to send a clear message of retaliation. Along with his friend, Terry Nichols, McVeigh began to plan to bomb the Murrah Building to convey just that message.

Almost immediately after the bombing occurred, the media responded to the attack. Television news channels began to report what they knew of the bombing and to

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[1] Edward T. Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University, 2001): 6.

speculate about who was responsible for this act of terrorism. As a result of this rapid reporting, the majority of Americans throughout the nation were aware of what had occurred in Oklahoma City. Creating a sense of "national community," the media shaped the response to the terrorist act and allowed Americans to come together to grieve the loss of innocent lives. To explain this unification in the face of tragedy, American historian Edward Linenthal remarks, "Bereavement, perhaps, is one of the only ways that Americans can imagine themselves as 'one,' a condition that seemingly trumps divisions of race, class, gender, and ideology."[2] In her interviews with ordinary citizens about their responses to the Oklahoma City Bombing, Susan Koppelman noted that many of them spoke about how the media shaped their view of what happened on April 19. For some, the media coverage was nearly of same magnitude as the actual bombing.[3]

While this "condition" of amalgamation certainly can have many positive effects, including support for the survivors and rescue workers, it can also have a dark side, which was seen in the aftermath of the bombing. The national community searched for someone to blame for the tragedy and was certain that it could not be a member of this "wonderful country." Guided by the media, numerous people made accusations towards the Middle East and Muslims. Several of the news reports included backing from supposed government sources and a former director of the FBI and CIA claimed that the attack was classically Middle Eastern. Some Americans even went so far as to threaten

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[2]Edward T. Linenthal, "Violence and the American Landscape: The Challenge of Public History" *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History*, vol. 16 (Winter 2002).

[3] Susan Koppelman, "The Oklahoma City Bombing: Our Responses, Our Memories" in *Ordinary Reactions to Extraordinary Events*, edited by Ray B. Browne and Arthur B. Neal (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 2001): 106

Muslims or vandalize mosques.[4] Despite the fact that the police sketches of the suspects were of white men, the media continued to refuse to believe that the perpetrators were Americans.

In contrast to these negative reactions, many more Americans responded with love and support for Oklahoma City. The first such heroes of this tragedy were the rescue workers who rushed into the building to save any victims who were still alive within the rubble. Included in this group was Rebecca Anderson, a nurse who was killed when concrete fell on her head as she tried to assist in the rescue efforts. To assess injuries and treat serious wounds on the spot, triage units were quickly constructed. Besides the men and women who actually went into the remains of the Murrah Building, there were thousands of other volunteers who came to Oklahoma City to help in any way that they could. The Oklahoma Restaurant Association, which was having a trade show, served meals to all of the workers, massage therapists helped the volunteers to relax their tense muscles, and the Oklahoma Veterinary Medical Association set up medical care centers for the rescue dogs. So many mental health specialists came in to assist those affected by the bombing that some were sent away. Beyond those Americans who were actually able to travel to Oklahoma City, thousands more sent letters of support, donations of money and needed items, and classrooms of schoolchildren sent drawings and cards. This tremendous outpouring of care and encouragement was soon recognized as the "Oklahoma Standard."[5]

Concern for the mental health of all those who the attack affected was a major element of the rescue operations. After the Oklahoma City bombing, a large percentage

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[4] Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing*, 18.
[5] Linenthal, 47-48.

of the population was affected in some manner. A study conducted from the immediate aftermath to about a year and a half after the terrorist act showed that many suffered negative mental effects from the trauma. Around the country, young children who were exposed to the horrific images on the television experienced post-traumatic stress disorder. Among those that were the hit hardest with these effects were the rescue workers who felt that they had failed because they could not save more people from the rubble. Out of the many volunteers, at least six committed suicide in the next two years. Throughout this time while Americans tried to make sense of what had happened, churches and mental health workers made their services available.[6] The government also provided funds to assist the families who had lost loved ones.

Despite the fact that the nation realized that these people were traumatized, American culture soon pressured survivors to return to their lives as normal. Emphasizing the idea that grief is a "process" and that certain actions can bring "closure," the media and other Americans encouraged those affected by the Oklahoma City bombing to "get over it." When many individuals simply could not live up to these expectations, some began to believe that something was wrong with them.[7] Instead of supporting those who were mourning, those people who were able to regain their lives thought those who could not were weak.

One of the ways that the media suggested the Oklahoma City population could recover was through the conviction of the perpetrator. The public immediately condemned Timothy McVeigh. Apprehended shortly after the bombing on an unrelated charge, McVeigh was quickly recognized as the man responsible for the act of terrorism.

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[6] Linenthal, 71, 77.
[7] Linenthal, 93-94.

Once convicted, McVeigh was sentenced to death. On June 11, 2001, McVeigh was executed while the victims' families were permitted to watch on closed circuit television in order to help them gain closure.[8]

As a result of this act of terrorism on American soil, the government decided to respond publicly. Officials issued statements of reassurance, which served to calm most of the nation. To back up these announcements, the Federal Bureau of Investigation hired more agents in order to take on a larger number of domestic terrorism cases.[9] Spending $600 million, the government tried to protect its employees through improving the security in its buildings. On April 24, 1996, President Bill Clinton signed an anti-terrorism law, the Omnibus Antiterrorism Act, which was immediately heavily criticized. On the one side, some Americans protested that it violated their rights as citizens, while others said that it was not strong enough to deter any future terrorists. Later, more legislation was passed as a consequence of the families' lobbying. The Terrorist and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 limited the use of *habeas corpus*, while the Victim Allocution Clarification Act of 1997 permitted victims of a crime to participate as both observers and witnesses in trials and to offer impact testimony.[10]

Another important aspect of the public reaction to the bombing was the memorialization process that followed. Soon after the Oklahoma City bombing, rescue workers erected a simple chain fence to mark the area as dangerous, and this fence quickly evolved into a place for people to mourn and to leave messages of comfort. Until

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[8] Indianapolis Star, "Library Factfiles: The Oklahoma City Bombing," Indianapolis Star, http://www2.indystar.com/library/factfiles/.
[9] Carol W. Lewis, "The Terror that Failed: Public Opinion in the Aftermath of the Bombing in Oklahoma City," *Public Administration Review*, vol. 60, no. 3, (May-Jun., 2000): 202-203.
[10] Linenthal, 28-31, 104-106.

it was incorporated into the memorial, visitors continued to use the fence to express their feelings about what happened there on April 19.[11] When the government decided to create a memorial on the site of where the Murrah Building once stood, there was conflict over what the monument should look like because so many Americans felt connected to the event. The winning design includes 168 empty chairs for those who were killed. Two large pillars, one with 9:01 and the other with 9:03, stand on the edge of the park capturing the fateful moment of 9:02 inside the memorial. Eventually, a museum with information about the Oklahoma City bombing and its aftermath was built.[12] The Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum continues to sponsor an essay contest, marathon, and civic awards in the memory of those who were killed.

When Timothy McVeigh detonated a bomb inside the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, it is doubtful that he could have foreseen all of the consequences of his actions. The media grabbed hold of this story and tried to create enemies out of possible suspects while glorifying the thousands of volunteers who worked tirelessly to save lives. Reaching far beyond those people who were immediately affected by the act, hundreds, if not thousands, suffered long-term mental effects that were not always understood by other Americans. Both the bombing and McVeigh's trial provoked change within the government, which decided to remember the horrific incident through a memorial as well as legislation. An infamous event, the Oklahoma City bombing elicited numerous reactions from America.

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[11] Linenthal, 164-171.
[12] Linenthal, 218-231.

Tokyo Subway Attack

Almost exactly one month before the Oklahoma City bombing, Tokyo experienced a similar terrorist attack. Japanese citizens released sarin, a deadly gas, in the Tokyo subway system in an attempt to kill other Japanese to send a message to the government. While this attack was not as deadly as the bombings, twelve people did die and hundreds more were injured. The effects of the gas attack continued to linger quietly for a longer period of time than most Japanese wanted to admit.

One of the striking differences between the Oklahoma City bombing and the subway attacks was that an individual like Timothy McVeigh did not instigate the terrorism in Japan. Instead, these attacks were the work of a cult, Aum Shinrikyo,[13] which had gained both popularity and adherents rapidly in the early 1990s. These members were normally well-educated young Japanese who did not feel that they had a place in society outside of the Aum. As book reviewer, Ian Hacking, wrote, "Aum was made up of reasonably prosperous, reasonably educated and unreasonably lonely young people in an eclectic society."[14] Asahara, the leader of the Aum, was responsible for the idea of the sarin attack and urged his members to commit the crime, but, without the structure of this "new religion," it is doubtful that these men would have participated in terrorism. Also, without the dedicated workers that the organization provided, producing the amount of sarin needed in such a short amount of time would have been impossible.

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[13] The Aum Shinrikyo's name is a combination of the Sanskrit word *aum* meaning the power of creation and destruction and the Japanese *shinrikyo*, which means teaching supreme truth. Chizuo Matsumoto, later known as Shoko Asahara, created this cult in 1984, proclaiming himself as a god and declaring that the end of the world was imminent and only Aum members would survive. Basically, this "new religion" was a combination of a few of the practices of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and the occult.

[14] Ian Hacking, "What Did Aum Shinrikyo Have in Mind?" review of *Underground*, by Haruki Murakami, *London Review of Books*, October 19, 2000, http://www.lrb.co.uk.

The Aum's decision to attack the Japanese public did not require much provocation. For several years, the police had suspected the cult of producing nerve gas but was never able to attain substantial proof because of Aum Shinrikyo's protected status as a religious group under Japanese law. When the Aum kidnapped and later murdered a well-known public notary whose sister had left the cult in early 1995, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department felt that it had to take action and raid the main compounds of the Aum. Through members in the army, the Aum found out about the planned searches and began to think of a "diversion" to prevent the police from invading their buildings. In a crisis meeting, Asahara approved of a plan to release sarin on the subways during rush hour and preparations immediately began. The plan was intended to stop government officials from reaching their offices. Only two days were given to the scientists to create the amount of gas that this plan required, which resulted in a lesser quality sarin. These impurities within the gas prevented the attacks from killing hundreds, if not thousands, more in the subway.[15]

Interestingly, the sarin attacks in the subway were not the Aum's first experiment with the deadly gas. Their involvement with sarin was a part of the cult's apocalyptic view of the world, and they planned to use it to "deliver" any enemies to a better world. When they first began producing the gas, Aum scientists tried exposing sheep to sarin on the cult's farm in western Australia in 1993. In 1994, the cult released the toxic gas in Matsumoto, a town northwest of Tokyo. They were attempting to kill three judges who the cult believed would rule against them in a court case. While the judges survived the attack, seven other citizens did not, and more than two hundred others were injured,

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[15] Jonathan B. Tucker, "The Tokyo Subway," in *War of Nerves* (New York: Pantheon, 2006): 341-343, 347.

including the judges. Aum Shinrikyo considered this attack a success because it postponed their court case and they were not suspected.[16]

On the morning of March 20, 1995, five ordinary looking men got onto five different subway lines in Tokyo with newspaper-covered packages. These five Aum members might not have agreed with what they were about to do, but they knew that to doubt Asahara's commands was to risk severe punishment at his hands. All felt that there was no other option but to go ahead with their instructions, so shortly after 8:00, each punctured his two or three bags of sarin with the tip of an umbrella. Once they had completed their mission, they exited the subway and tried to escape with their designated driver. Out of the eleven bags that made their way onto the trains, eight were punctured, releasing a total of 159 ounces of sarin. As the fumes spread throughout the car, passengers soon began to realize that something was not right.[17]

In his book, *Underground*, Haruki Murakami interviewed as many victims of the subway attack as he could in order to present a clear picture of what happened that morning. A majority of those that the gas attacks affected felt that speaking publicly about the effects would bring shame either to themselves or to their families and would not speak with Murakami. The people he did talk to provide an interesting look at how different people saw the events of March 20. Of everyone he interviewed, only one woman, who used the pseudonym, "Ikuko Nakayama," recognized the smell and the symptoms and equated these with sarin.[18] Numerous others mentioned smelling a foul odor and beginning to feel ill, but no one else recognized what was happening. Only a

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[16] Tucker, 336-339.
[17] Tucker, 344-345.
[18] Haruki Murakami, *Underground*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel (New York: Vintage, 2000): 114.

few even felt that the smell and their sickness were sufficient enough to leave the train before their planned stop or the forced evacuation.

When the subway trains were evacuated because of the chaos on board, the subway stations soon turned into scenes of pandemonium. None of the station attendants knew what was wrong, with initial reports of a sick passenger on board one of the cars, then an explosion, and finally a command to evacuate. Even when the trains were completely closed down an hour and a half after the initial attack, the police and military authorities did not recognize the substance as sarin until 10:00 a.m. and failed to tell the medical personnel for at least another hour. Some hospitals learned that the gas was sarin only when they heard the reports on the television. As a result, many patients did not receive proper treatment in a timely fashion. In addition to the confusion over the cause of the illnesses, the hospitals were horribly overcrowded and could not adequately treat all of the patients that arrived. Also, the emergency services sent most of their ambulances to the first station that called which left few resources for the other stations where the trains stopped to allow sarin victims to exit.[19]

One of the Japanese who rode the Chiyoda Line to work every morning, Kiyoka Izumi, experienced frustration with the lack of ambulances. Since she had previously worked for Japan Railways, she was trained to deal with medical emergencies and felt compelled to help others that the sarin had more seriously affected. Despite the fact that she herself was not feeling well, Izumi took charge at the station and tried to help those waiting for an ambulance. When she realized that none were coming, Izumi convinced a

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[19] Robyn Pangi, "Consequence Management in the 1995 Sarin Attacks on the Japanese Subway System," BCSIA Discussion Paper 2002-4, ESDP Discussion Paper ESDP-2002-01 (John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, February 2002): 12-14, 17.

television camera crew to take the sick people in their van to the hospital. Remembering the horrific images of that day, Izumi explained why she had to help the others, "Nobody was dealing with things calmly. No one even caring for the sick. Everyone just abandoned us there the whole time and walked on by. It was absolutely terrible."[20]

At Kodemmacho Station, Ken'ichi Yamazaki did not think that anyone would help him when he took ill. On his way to work, Yamazaki was told to get off of the subway. Not understanding what was happening, Yamazaki stood for a few minutes on the platform before calling his house to ask them to tell his work that he was running late. During the phone call, he began to feel that his lungs no longer worked. After trying to catch another train, Yamazaki collapsed near the station in Shibuya. He sat, unable to move, for some time while people walked past him. Fortunately, one of his colleagues got off at that station and finally took him to the hospital in a taxi. When Yamazaki recalled that day, he was angry at all those people who pretended not to see him suffering on the sidewalk.[21] Experiences like Yamazaki's were not uncommon.

In Tokyo that morning there were no rescue workers to help the people who were ill out of the subway. Before the illnesses were identified as symptoms of a gas attack, the subway station attendants were the only officials present at the scene. Most of these men acted bravely, and two lost their lives as a result of prolonged exposure to the sarin gas. One of the attendants who did move the sarin packages off the train and manage to survive was Sumio Nishimura. After helping two passengers who were sick off of the train, Nishimura removed the two sarin packets from the train and he and another worker placed them in another bag and inside a bucket. Within minutes, Nishimura's eyes began

[20] Murakami, 18.
[21] Murakami, 185-188.

to lose the ability to focus. He had to spend six days in the hospital to recover from the attack. When Murakami asked about picking the packets up, though, Nishimura said he was simply doing his job: "If I hadn't been there, somebody else would have picked up the packets. Work means you fulfill your duties. You can't look the other way."[22] In spite of their best efforts, though, the station attendants like Nishimura were not trained to deal with a terrorist attack and did not know how to respond. Even if they were aware that the packages contained sarin, these officials would not have known how to handle the situation.[23]

Lack of training and information resulted in a large amount of time before anyone thought to shut down the subways and in inefficient treatment of patients. Dr. Nobuo Yanagisawa, head of the School of Medicine at Shinshu University, recognized the poor organization of emergency services. Speaking of the Tokyo subway attacks as well as the Kobe earthquake, Yanagisawa commented, "The local units may be extremely swift to respond, but the overall picture is hopeless. There is no prompt and efficient system in Japan for dealing with a major catastrophe. There's no clear-cut chain of command."[24] Along with the issue of having no group to issue commands, the various agencies often did not communicate with one another on March 20. Despite the fact that the police, fire department, and hospitals all responded to the attack, none of these organizations communicated with the others.[25] This serious deficiency resulted in problems containing the contamination and transporting the ill.

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[22] Murakami, 83.
[23] Pangi, 14.
[24] Murakami, 222.
[25] Pangi, 17, 22.

Besides the immediate problems with health care on the day of the attack, little attention was paid to the potential mental health issues that the sarin could cause. In a study conducted in 1998, only 1,500 of those who the gas attacks affected agreed to fill out the survey, revealing how sensitive a topic this remains for the Japanese. According to this study, 17% experienced mental and emotional suffering, such as flashbacks and panic attacks, when boarding a train.[26] Another one of the subway station attendants who survived dealing with the sarin packets, Toshiaki Toyoda, acknowledged that, although he no longer suffers physically, he is scarred mentally. He returned to work at the subway and had to overcome his fear that something like the gas attacks could happen again.[27] For those victims who cannot deal with the psychological effects on their own, there is little support from the government. Other than a monetary compensation to the families of the dead or severely injured, the government left the victims of the terrorist attacks to pay for their own long-term care. No official response was made to help the victims, nor was any attention given to the specific needs in mental health that this disaster created.[28]

Another shortcoming of the Japanese government was the lack of information that they provided to the general public. As in America, members of the media were among of the first people at the scenes of the crisis and provided almost instant coverage. Unfortunately, media representatives were often misinformed and created a sense of near panic with images of injured people staggering out of subway stations. When the government did not provide reassurance, the majority of the population worried that another attack was imminent. Before the cult was known to have committed the crime,

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[26] "Victims of Subway Gas Attack Still Suffer," *The Daily Yomiuri*, January 31, 1999, http://www.factnet.org.
[27] Murakami, 38.
[28] Pangi, 35.

Aum Shinrikyo loudly protested its innocence while the Japanese government remained silent on the matter. The media soon fixated on the Aum, especially after several of its members were convicted, and what it meant that ordinary Japanese citizens would join such a group. The Aum Shinrikyo was overwhelmingly made to seem evil in the media. Rather than focus on what the nation could do to support the victims, the media emphasized the problems with Japanese society and how it was not as safe as it once was.[29] The apocalyptic message that the Aum propagated was spread throughout Japan via the media, and audiences were captivated by the continual coverage of this topic.[30]

Fortunately for the public's sense of wellbeing, the majority of the ringleaders in the Tokyo sarin attack were quickly apprehended. Within a year of the attack, the Tokyo police had taken over 400 members of Aum Shinrikyo into custody. On December 19, 1995, the Aum's protection through its religious status was lost when this standing was revoked.[31] The five members who were responsible for releasing the sarin in the subways and their drivers all received sentences of life imprisonment or death, except for Katsuya Takahashi who remains a fugitive at large. As the leader of Aum Shinrikyo and the instigator of the attacks, Asahara was sentenced to death by hanging.[32]

Similar to the effect of the Oklahoma City bombing in America, the Japanese government recognized that changes in the laws were necessary to reassure the public. The first of piece of legislation to pass was the Law Related to the Prevention of Bodily Harm Caused by Sarin and Similar Substances, which prohibited the manufacture, possession, and use of sarin or similar substances. In December 1995, the Japanese Diet

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[29] Pangi, 24.
[30] Yumiko Iida, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 239.
[31] Pangi, 33.
[32] Murakami, 365.

revised the Religious Corporations Law in order to allow authorities to have more power to keep an eye on potentially threatening religious groups. A little more than a year after the attacks, the Police Law was expanded to permit prefectural police to extend their authority into other prefects to combat spreading crime. Lastly, The Group Regulation Law of 1999 regulates groups that have carried out arbitrary mass murders. Again, like the American legislation, these laws were criticized for both not having the ability to prevent future terrorism and restricting the freedoms of individuals.[33]

The Aum Shinrikyo attacks on the Tokyo subway system were the first major acts of violence on Japanese soil since World War II. As a result, the Japanese government and public safety officials were not properly prepared to deal with large-scale terrorism and its impact on society. Injured individuals did not receive prompt, appropriate care and the public was not kept informed with what was happening. Despite these deficiencies, the Aum members responsible for the attacks were quickly apprehended and convicted. To help prevent a similar future disaster the Japanese Diet wrote new legislation. Remaining one of the momentous events of the twentieth century in Japan, the sarin attacks on the subway shocked the Japanese people who were convinced something like that could not happen in their nation.

Of course, without a basic understanding of the traditional cultural values of both Japan and America it is impossible to see how these reactions to the incidents reflect on these ideals. The next portion of this paper will focus on explaining what national character is and then what traits each society venerates.

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[33] Pangi, 34.

What is National Character?

National character is the set of principles that one culture treasures as the most important to the majority of individuals and the attributes that result from valuing these standards. In his article, "'Social Character' As a Sociological Concept," Henry Ozanne defines social character as the relationship between cultural norms and the group of individuals' acceptance of these rules.[34] For example, a society that stresses generosity is likely to have many persons who liberally give to charitable causes. Outside of hypothetical examples, discovering the traits that each country has is more complicated, but it is possible to identify characteristics that distinguish a particular group of people.

Obviously, more than one nation can possess a certain quality. Several countries are going to stress that people are generous or humble, or whatever trait that applies. What makes the national character unique for each society is the combination of characteristics and how this arrangement is presented to those outside of that group. Emphasizing a certain blend of qualities is what distinguishes one culture from another. Noted Japanese scholar Harumi Befu notes, "It is a truism that every culture is in some sense unique."[35]

As an "invented tradition," national character is not a genetic trait, or one that someone simply adopts from living within a certain region. No individual is born with the character of the nation that they live in imprinted into their brains. Instead, according to Japanese sociologist Nyozekan Hasegawa, "It is built up over a long period of history,

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[34] Henry Ozanne, "'Social Character' as a Sociological Concept," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 8, no. 5 (Oct., 1943): 521.
[35] Harumi Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity* (Portland: Trans Pacific, 2001), 66.

and its formation and growth take place hand in hand with the formation and development of social and cultural forms."[36] When parents raise their children in a certain culture, they tend to emphasize the qualities that their nation does. If a child were born into a society in which everyone is generous, that child would have a hard time fitting in with his peers if he is always stingy. Since national character is one of the results of the socialization process, immigrants often do not adopt the characteristics of their new nationality but cling to those of their traditional home that they are familiar with.

Despite the fact that national character is not ingrained in the minds of all citizens at birth, these characteristics do manage to stay steady over extended periods of time. Rarely do the recognized traits of a society abruptly change into another set of qualities. Small alterations are made, of course, as nations modernize and come into contact with other countries, but the general character remains the same. Since national character is so unlikely to shift, these attributes provide an excellent basis for comparisons. Tasuku Harada argues,

> Systems and organizations, way and methods, are in greater or lesser degree flexible, and subject to change and modification...But the "soul" of the nation is an unchanging norm...It is therefore essential that each people should patiently and sympathetically study the mind and ideals of their neighbors, so that all nations may come to a fuller understanding and appreciation of the aims and aspirations of one another.[37]

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[36] Nyozekan Hasegawa, *The Japanese Character: A Cultural Profile*, trans. John Bester (Palo Alto: Kodansha, 1966), 3.
[37] Tasuku Harada, "National Characteristics of the Japanese" *News Bulletin (Institute of Pacific Relations)*, (Jun.-Jul., 1927): 5.

Examining these relatively fixed qualities of a nation does provide a good illustration of what the people of that country, in general, are like and presents an indicator for their behavior, as well.

Obviously, no generalization is perfect. The idea of a national character does not mean that everyone in a given society will have those traits. Some individuals will have characteristics that run counter to those of the general public. Even if a person does seem to fit the ideal of the national character, he might not necessarily agree with all of the values. Beyond those persons who are naturally unlike, immigrants are another group who often are not completely integrated into this model. On the other hand, the majority of individuals do represent this national character and all that it implies. If the greater part of a society did not correspond with this idea, then that group of attributes would cease to stands as a "national" character.

American Dreams

Looking at the United States of America, it would not initially appear as if the country has a dominant national character that the majority identifies with. Within the nation, there are hundreds of different ethnic, religious, and social groups, all with their own ideas on what norms are the best to follow. America is a conglomeration of many nationalities, the land of immigrants, where people come to experience liberty of actions. No one is the same in America, and that fact is celebrated.

In spite of all of these differences, or perhaps because of them, the American character developed in a way different from many other nations. Instead of focusing on the past, or what is occurring in the present, the American national character concentrates

on what is possible for the future. The phrase that best describes this phenomenon is the American Dream. This hard to define idea shapes the nation and the individuals who live within it. Indeed, adherence to this illusive "dream" is what makes someone truly an American. Without this ideal, the United States and its inhabitants do not compose the exceptional or unusual country that the world believes it is.

Just what the American Dream entails is a difficult task to explain. Many different American Dreams exist, with possibly as many as one for every American who is old enough to understand this standard. James Truslow Adams, a famed scholar on American history and the one to coin the term "American Dream," refers to it as "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man."[38] While that statement is certainly true, it fails to provide an exact description of what the Dream is and how it tries to make life "better and richer and fuller." Those terms are vague and open to interpretation, as well. What makes one man's life better would rarely work for an entire nation of men.

In his book, *Cynicism and the Evolution of the American Dream*, historian Wilber Caldwell writes that the American Dream lacks a precise definition no matter how many people have tried to assign it one. On the other hand, Caldwell does try to explain what he views as characteristics of the Dream in order to assist his readers in understanding what he means when he refers to this term. In his description, the American Dream is always recognizable, because it is larger than a sum of all its individual parts, which includes each citizen's hopes. Fiercely individualistic, the Dream is arrogant, because it assumes that the American way is the best way, and progressive. Rather than being

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[38] James Truslow Adams as cited in Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation* (New York: Oxford University, 2003): 7.

content with what the nation has accomplished to this point, the American Dream constantly looks ahead and tries it improve the nation for each generation that follows. With this idea of providing a better life for the next group of Americans, the Dream has an idealistic side and also a materialistic one. While the current adults dream of giving their children a world that includes equality, liberty, and hope, they also wish to provide them with a home, a car, and all of the many mass culture products that are desired.[39] These qualities do provide a basis for what the American Dream is to many who live in the United States.

Unlike Caldwell, American historian Jim Cullen does not separate the ideal into two ideologies. Instead, he builds his book, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*, around what he refers to as the "main" dreams. Before he describes these models, Cullen asserts that the American Dream is desirable because of its mysterious and mythical features that render it all but impossible to attain.[40] As a result, the American Dreams that he writes about are grandiose ideals that our nation has worked to achieve but experience great difficulty in realizing completely. Aspirations of liberty, upward mobility, equality, owning a home, and celebrity for all are Cullen's choices for prototypical American Dreams, although he acknowledges that there are many more in existence. These particular dreams, though, he states, have had the greatest impact in forming the nation's history.[41]

As the central basis for the hopes of a nation, the American Dream is many things to many people. Similarly, the United States is a country that lacks a unified ethnicity,

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[39]Wilber W. Caldwell, *Cynicism and the Evolution of the American Dream* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac, 2006): 36-46.
[40] Cullen, 6.
[41] Cullen, 8-10.

religion, and common history. Somehow, though, this idea that each person can create a better life for himself and for his children brings all of the diverse individuals inside this country together.

Those who believe in the American Dream do share certain characteristics. One of the classic American qualities is "rugged individualism." Instead of focusing on the group, many Americans choose to concentrate on themselves and what is best for them. This attribute is seen throughout history, from the pioneer who survived alone on the harsh prairie eking out a living to the freelance journalist of today who travels by himself in search of the story that he can sell to the news organization of his choosing. Even Americans' homes reflect this individualistic streak: houses are private, with a yard separating it from its neighbors, and each member of the family has his or her own room or space. American culture concentrates on the individual. Video games, fast food restaurants, online shopping, and television all reduce contact with other people.[42] Another example of individualism in the United States is the emphasis on competition. In order to ensure that every person tries his hardest, many groups utilize competition and reward the individual winner.

Beginning when their children are young, most parents instill in their children an independent attitude. As infants, children are given their own bed and often a private bedroom apart from their parents, which creates the idea that they must tend to their own needs at night. Once children reach their teenage years, it is not unusual for them to obtain employment and start earning money so that they have the ability to provide for

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[42] Poranee Natadecha-Sponsel, "Individualism as an American Cultural Value," in *One World, Many Cultures (Sixth Edition)*, ed. Stuart and Terry Hirschberg (New York: Longman, 2007): 403.

their leisure activities that their parents might not fund. After American children move out of their parents' home, unlike in many cultures, it is rare for them to choose to move back in, especially after they marry.[43] All of these practices nurture the individualism that is prevalent in the United States.

Historically, the development of this individual-focused society made sense. With a country that possesses as much physical space as the United States does, there is no need for citizens to live in a small area. Many Americans at least desire to live in their own homes and have space between their families and their neighbors. This trend shows an increase in independence and privacy. For the majority of the nation's history, the American Frontier, according to Frederick Turner's famed thesis, provided a sort of safety valve. When a person would grow discontented with his life, he could simply move West and start a new life. In the West, Americans were forced to depend only on themselves because there were so few others living in the same region. This idea of the "rugged individual" who did not need anyone else to live successfully evolved into a national ideal.

The value placed on hard work evolved into an important component of individualism. Often referred to as the "Protestant work ethic," many citizens highly value this characteristic of America. As the developed nation with the least amount of vacation time and highest number of work hours, the United States is a country filled with people who continue to adhere to this traditional value. Anxious to work hard to create a better life for himself, the American tries to achieve his dreams through gainful

[43] Natadecha-Sponsel, 404.

employment.[44] Also, with the individualistic tendencies of society, Americans do not always feel that they can trust other members of the group to accomplish tasks. Instead of relying on others, Americans will often believe that they can complete their work better than anyone else could.

Like individualism, this work ethic has roots in the rearing of children and in history. Children are encouraged to do their best in school, athletics, or music in order to secure a "good" future. In all of these areas, children quickly learn that only the ones who are willing to spend time studying or practicing will excel and earn the praise of their parents and teachers. The American Dream focuses on the future, and so does the Protestant work ethic, which teaches that those who work hard will reap the benefits later in life, and Americans learn this at a young age. Looking back into the past, America is enjoying the products of the toil of previous generations. To create a nation that could successfully compete with Europe in the business and political realms, Americans had to exert themselves.[45] Believing that the United States' prestigious place in the world is a result of two centuries of others' hard work, most Americans look to maintain this position through their own labor.

With a national history that emphasizes the quest for individual success through hard work, it is not surprising that love of equality is another attribute that citizens of the United States are ascribed. While true equality in all areas of life may never occur, Most Americans probably believe that it is possible and constantly work towards that goal. Regardless of race, social class, gender, or religious affiliation, every American should have the same opportunities to improve himself. Cullen explains, "Virtually all of us need

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[44] Caldwell, 41.
[45] Caldwell, 47-48.

to believe that equality is one of the core values of American everyday life that its promises extend to everyone. If they don't, then not everyone is eligible for the American Dream...its major moral underpinning is that everyone is eligible."[46] He also notes that while Americans might choose to have faith that all people are equal, daily life often reveals that this is not the case. Despite the lack of egalitarianism in reality, a passion for equality is seen in the American character.

In recent years, the Civil Rights movement was a major push for equal rights for all citizens. The United States, though, is no stranger to equality movements. Earlier in the twentieth century, the woman's suffrage groups fought for, and gained, full citizenship for women. Listing all of the gains in equality for diverse groups of people in the country would take several pages. These numerous quests for equality elucidate why Americans are so fond of believing that complete equality is possible.[47] Again, both parents and teachers pass this value on to children. When a child has siblings, he is told that they are all loved equally and no one is more important than the other. At school, every child learns that he can work hard and do as well as anyone else in his class. Children are all given the same opportunities while in school. Having these lessons at an early age prepares young Americans to treasure equality for their entire adult life as well.

With this passion for equality, it only makes sense that most Americans also possess a democratic nature. Since everyone should have an equal opportunity to succeed in life, everyone should have the right to have a say in how they are governed and society is run as well. Majority rule is a common sight in groups, classes, and businesses. All people are given the chance to voice their opinions on whatever the issue at hand is, and

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[46] Cullen, 108.
[47] Cullen, 131.

then are allowed to have a choice in what the solution to the matter will be. Holding dear the right to elect public officials, Americans cannot imagine a situation in which the public would not have a voice.[48] Knowing their rights, Americans are rarely afraid to speak up if they feel that some law or judicial decision is unfair. Even in schools, a spirit of democracy is fostered in children through elections to the school council or voting for a class president. Children learn that they have the ability to pick their leaders, and if those leaders do not perform as they promised, to choose another person the next year. Seen at all levels of communities, democracy is an important value to American citizens.

Almost from the United States' inception as a nation, Americans have valued the concept of government by the consent of the governed. Even the Puritans, some of the first colonists, participated in a basic type of town hall democracy.[49] The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution advocated individual rights that support this value. Consent of the governed, then, is perhaps the fundamental American value that underlies all of the others.

Another feature that has existed within the United States since the founding of the nation is an appreciation of the freedom of expression. Promising to protect the right to freedom of speech or the press in the first amendment, the government has a strong commitment to this basic American right. Placing this right in the beginning of the Bill of Rights emphasizes its significance. Freedom of the press is an important aspect of this amendment. In the twentieth century, court cases such as *Shenck v. United States* in 1919 continued to protect this liberty in almost all circumstances. Later, Franklin D. Roosevelt included freedom of speech in his "Four Freedoms" which defined the unalienable rights

[48] Cullen, 86-87.
[49] Cullen, 22.

of every American citizen.[50] Recently, anti-terrorism laws such as the Omnibus Counterterrorism Act and the Patriot Act have come under criticism for curtailing this freedom in their attempts to stop terrorist attacks. The controversy that arises from any threat to the freedom of expression is clear evidence that Americans hold this right dear.

These attributes of the American Dream help define Americans. Individualism, a strong work ethic, a commitment to equality, a democratic spirit, and freedom of speech.are rooted in a powerful American tradition evident to varying degrees throughout the history of the nation, as well as seen in the methods of child rearing. Together, these values can describe the ideal American and compose the core of the United States' national character.

Japanese Identity from *Nihonjiron*

Compared to Americans, the inhabitants of Japan have much in common. The Japanese share a history, religion, language, and geography. Instead of a country composed of many ethnic groups, Japan is almost entirely what is now considered Japanese[51] with relatively few immigrants. As a result of the mountainous terrain on most of the islands, the Japanese live on a compact amount of land. Another factor that bound the Japanese closely together was the isolation of the nation for about 250 years before the Meiji Restoration. This complete separation of the Japanese from the world, along with the close quarters and the uniform Japanese education system, produced an

[50] Cullen, 57.
[51] This term includes several ethnic groups that the majority group has assimilated over time.

established idyllic culture that the majority of the Japanese can relate to. Obviously, in recent years, Japanese society has evolved rapidly and no longer completely adheres to all of these ideals, just as America does not as strongly espouse some of the characteristics of the American Dream as it has previously.

In some ways similar to the American Dream, *Nihonjiron* is an idea that most Japanese subscribe to and is one that distinguishes them from the inhabitants of all other countries and reaffirms their identity. *Nihonjiron*, literally "discussions of the Japanese," is a genre of literature that glorifies Japanese culture and traditions. Listing characteristics of an idealized Japanese culture, *nihonjiron* provides a model for behavior for the Japanese. According to Befu, "*Nihonjiron* provides the material for Japanese ethnic and national identity."[52] Like the American Dream, *Nihonjiron* presents an ideal Japan. Any individual would have difficulty in living a life that reflects all of the qualities that these works say are evident in the Japanese.

Promoting Japanese superiority in many ways of life, *Nihonjiron* strives to provide the country with a unifying identity.[53] This identity presented in *Nihonjiron* is an abstract ideal that differentiates the Japan from the West.[54] One of the assumptions in books in this genre is that Japan is a homogeneous society where generalized statements can apply to all Japanese. As *Nihonjiron* gained popularity in the 1970s, the authors drew inspiration from earlier works while also creating their own ideas of what constitutes Japan. For many of these authors, the American Ruth Benedict's study, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, provided a starting point for their works and they would

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[52] Befu, 119.
[53] Kosaku Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 12.
[54] Iida, 201.

often revisit some of her ideas in their own works.[55] Despite its problems as an inaccurate view of the modern Japanese, *Nihonjiron* can be viewed as attempts to provide the Japanese with a cohesive "dream." Whether or not the collection of *Nihonjiron* is correct, this paper will utilize its definitions of the Japanese identity for a point of comparison with the traditional ideals of the United States.

Many versions of *Nihonjiron* exist, just as there are numerous variations on the American Dream. In this range of literature, a majority of the same traits are listed repeatedly because these attributes are the ones that differentiate Japan from other countries, especially the West. Even if the same attributes are listed, though, the reasoning for why these qualities are "Japanese" differs.[56] This study tries to present the most prominent of these theories for each trait. Another interesting difference between *Nihonjiron* and its American equivalent is that these books run the gamut from purely scholarly works to popular literature that the Japanese can read on the subway. Public interest in the explanation of who the Japanese are is common.[57]

One of the major criticisms of *Nihonjiron* is that it promotes an "us versus them" mentality in the Japanese viewing the rest of the world as outsiders.[58] This objection is valid since most Japanese do tend to see the world in terms of insiders and outsiders, or us/them. At a young age, Japanese children are taught their first distinction of us/them when they learn about the difference between *uchi* ("home," "inside") and *soto* ("outside"). Since anywhere outside of the home is considered dirty, the Japanese always take their shoes off and wash carefully before entering into the clean home. Also, outside

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[55] Befu, 51, 69.
[56] Befu, 5.
[57] Befu, 7.
[58] Yoshino, 11.

of the home is often portrayed as dangerous to a small child. These same words are then used to describe people who are in one's group, whether family, business or social, and those who are outside of that group. As children learn these ideas in connection with cleanliness and safety, *uchi* is often connected with good mental images while *soto* is not. Another example of this division between us/them is the ideas of *tatemae* and *honne*. *Tatemae* is translated as "public behavior," or how someone must act around people not in their group, and *honne* as "true feelings," how someone may behave around group members. While children are still young, their family takes care to help them learn this distinction.[59]

With views that heavily emphasize the group's role in life and how it influences behavior, it is not surprising that Japan is a group-oriented rather than individualistic, society. Membership within a group of some sort is what provides the Japanese with the basis of their identity. Often, a child will begin with membership in his family, then take part in his group of year-mates at school and, later in life, in the business world. Hobby groups that range from those interested in the traditional art of floral arrangement to baseball also exist beyond those traditional groups. If someone is not able to fit into a family, business, school, or hobby group, that Japanese person will often feel as if he does not have a place in society. To provide these individuals a place to belong, "new religions," some of which are similar to cults in Western society, began to appear in the late twentieth century.[60] The importance of this group-orientation is reflected even in the

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[59] Joy Hendry, *Understanding Japanese Society, 2nd edition* (New York: Routledge, 1995): 42-46.
[60] Edwin Oldfather Reischauer, *The Japanese* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of University of Harvard Press, 1977), 129-134.

Japanese language, where the characters for the word for person, *ningen*, actually mean "among humans," suggesting that a person is never viewed as a lone entity.

While the Japanese do not oppose the idea of self-identity, they view individuality as similar to selfishness. Indeed, the word for individualism in Japanese, *kojin shugi*, implies selfishness at the expense of others.[61] A person should work to bring pride and honor to their group rather than to an individual. Attempting to appear different from everyone else in any way was traditionally viewed as rebelling against society, as seen in the traditional proverb, "the nail that sticks out is hammered down." In recent years, this opposition to individualism has subsided somewhat as a result of interaction with individualistic Western cultures. Still, self-discipline (*shuyo)* is highly regarded in Japan and conforming to the group's standards is seen as an act of self-control. In *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, anthropologist Ruth Benedict's landmark study of Japan, she notes that "strength of character, they think, is shown in conforming not in rebelling."[62] Unlike in America, when a person is seen as mature when they assert their individuality by leaving their familial home, the Japanese think that a mature person is willing to accept the authority of the group.

To be seen as a productive group member, the Japanese are cooperative and place a high value on harmony (*wa*). If a group is in constant conflict, it will not accomplish much. Realizing this truth, Japanese often try to avoid any form of discord. Going along with that goal, the Japanese are a non-litigious people who try to avoid spending time in

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[61] Befu, 21.
[62] Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (New York: Signet, 1946): 207.

the courtroom. Many even believe that "a harmonious community is the ideal society."[63] Accomplishing this goal requires a great deal of reasonableness and the ability to understand others.[64] In the business world, a good manager is one who can identify sources of disputes among employees and resolve them quickly before these problems develop into an issue that would result in direct conflict. Living close together in a small area in a group-oriented society has taught Japan to appreciate harmonious relationships.

An interesting aspect of this desire to not create conflict is the tendency of some Japanese to alter their view of history in order for their past to agree with their current thoughts. *Nihonjiron* authors are particularly guilty of speaking of an ideal prewar Japan that was a continuously peaceful nation. In her writing, Iida says, "[T] he general Japanese cultural orientation...is filled with a 'longing' to believe that historical conditions can be transformed merely by changing the way one looks at them."[65] Through a modification of history, the Japanese are able to reconcile history with their model of a perfectly harmonious country.[66]

Avoiding arguments with leadership figures is not difficult in Japan, where the line of command is clear. Authority within groups is often quite strict, with junior members treating more senior ones with the utmost respect. Unlike in America, where suggestions of hierarchy are usually anathema, in Japan, society is set up in a hierarchical pattern. While this does not necessarily mean that there is an emphasis on class distinctions, a Japanese person is expected to have a high regard for his elders or leaders. Even the language reflects the vertical nature of this society, with certain words and

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[63] Harada, 8.
[64] Reischauer, 135.
[65] Iida, 269.
[66] Iida, 255.

terms that are appropriate for a superior and those that are only used with close acquaintances. This "respect language" includes the use of honorifics, which indicate the relationship between the speaker and the listener, and familial words that belie the status of each family member, such as "honored older sister" and "younger brother."[67] As a result of this embedded tradition of verticality, almost every group has some form of hierarchy, including the family. From a young age, children are taught to treat not only their parents and grandparents with deference but also their older siblings as seen through the language. Based upon that early experience, children learn to apply that idea of a hierarchy to any group that they later join.[68]

Why is Japan a vertical society as opposed to a horizontal one like the United States? A possible answer lies in Japan's history as a feudal nation and its long history of hereditary authority. Until the Meiji era, the country was organized by a strict and complex hereditary system. Only those individuals who were of aristocratic birth were allowed to participate in the government or court life.[69] Another potential psychological reason is that Japanese society continues to urge individuals to form an attitude of dependence (*amae*) much like small children have with their parents. As children grow up, they are expected to some of this sense of dependence from their families to the leader of their new group, who in turn will care for them in a paternalistic manner. To receive this care, the dependent must loyally serve his surrogate "parent." In order to satisfy this dependent nature, a group must always have a "superior" member for the

[67] Befu, 37.
[68] Yoshino, 96-97.
[69] Reischauer, 157-158.

others to look to for support.[70] This account explains why Japanese business managers take a personal interest in their workers and will give them fatherly advice, for example. Similar to the United State's history of democracy, this tradition and nurture of hierarchy allows the practice to continue in modern Japanese life.

Along with their duty to their superiors in their groups, the Japanese have a number of obligations to the people around them. Japanese society is founded on the idea of reciprocity, that what one individual gives to another will eventually result in a repayment. Unlike in America, though, this concept of indebtedness (*on*) extends beyond financial consideration to all areas of life. For example, if a Japanese family has a guest over for dinner, that guest is expected to bring a gift to show their appreciation of the courtesy that the family is showing him. Children owe a certain debt (a form of *on* known as *ko*) to their parents for raising them, which they can repay through taking care of their parents in their old age and properly rearing their own children. *Giri* is the obligation that any Japanese has to someone outside of his family who assists him in any way. Although the repayment of *giri* is considered a burden, not to do so is shameful. As a result, the Japanese are sometimes reluctant to help a stranger, because that person would then feel obligated to settle that balance. Assisting an unfamiliar person would place an unwelcome, heavy burden on that individual.[71]

Since it is often impossible to pay all of these debts, or at least pay in full for these obligations, the Japanese are likely to feel shame (*haji*) at some point in their lives. As members of a group-oriented society, the Japanese are less concerned with feeling personally disappointed than letting their group down. A student who does not pass the

[70] Yoshino, 18.
[71] Benedict, 133-142.

entrance exams into high school has brought dishonor to his family, not just himself, and is not properly repaying his *ko*. Self-respect (*jicho*) encompasses the idea of living up to the ideals of propriety, which tends to make the Japanese conscious of the judgment of others. If an individual does not act with proper *jicho*, he will experience *haji* and this feeling will lead him to try to redeem himself. Consequently, *haji* is often referred to as the root of virtue in Japanese culture.[72]

Fortunately, another Japanese quality exists to counteract the responsibilities of *on* and *haji*. *Ninjo*, the idea of humanity or kindness, allows the Japanese to not always repay their debts as completely as *giri* would require. As the human element of all relationships, *ninjo* encourages harmony. In order to teach their children this habit, parents encourage them to think of others before they act and to not behave in any way that they would not like someone else to.[73] Currently, these concepts of duty are no longer as strongly stressed in Japan, although they do still linger.

Acting with *ninjo* does not require an individual to communicate verbally. Instead, that person should simply understand what another is feeling or thinking as a result of contextual and nonverbal skills. Communicating out loud is often unnecessary and is seen as not as sincere as what is conveyed without words. When writing about this topic, Befu said that *Nihonjiron* literature "argues that Japanese culture not only deemphasizes verbal communication but also places positive value on nonverbal aspects of communication. In short, silence is golden."[74] Since speaking is not always valued, the Japanese have gained a reputation for taciturnity. Rather than remaining quiet in order to

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[72] Benedict, 222-224.
[73] Hendry, 213.
[74] Befu, 39.

keep secrets, the Japanese choose not to talk in order to communicate in, what is to them, more meaningful ways.

Another important difference between the American and Japanese ideal traits is the nature of political values. In the United States, equality of opportunity, democracy, and freedom of speech form the cornerstone of government policy. Conversely, in Japan, the democratic government does not play a major role in influencing cultural values. On this topic, Iida notes, "[R] ather than Japanese cultural particulars being incompatible with its Constitution, it is those aspects of Japanese experience that cannot be reduced to rational legal codes and government structures that have come to be labeled 'Japanese culture.'"[75] Instead of focusing on civic rights, the Japanese chose to create a model character that is composed of social guidelines, probably because these qualities predate the modern Japanese government.

The Japanese traits of group-orientation, cooperation in order to achieve harmony, adherence to hierarchy, reciprocity, and a reserved nature compose a large portion of the Japanese national character. As Japan continues to play a large role in the international realm, some of these traditional attributes have lost their predominance in the culture but still remain relevant to Japanese lifestyles. Grounded in ancient practices, these qualities have proven difficult for the Japanese to alter.

[75] Iida, 6.

Responses as Reflections of Society

A nation's response to a major tragedy such as the Oklahoma City bombing or the sarin attacks on the Tokyo subway reveal some telling characteristics of that country's inhabitants. Since national character involves the group of principles that the majority of the citizens value and how they behave based on these traits, the behavior of the public in times of crisis illustrate their basic values. When an individual has very little time d to react to an event, responses are immediate and reflect the fundamental approaches of that person. According to Carol Lewis' article about public opinion after the bombing in Oklahoma, how a society responds to disaster is indicative of what is truly important to that country.[76] With that in mind, a comparison of how the United States and Japan reacted to these terrorist attacks should illustrate how the national characters of these two nations differ in fundamental ways. While these differences do not show one nation to be better in any respect than the other, they can help explain why Americans and Japanese sometimes experience difficulty in understanding one another's behavior. In no way should this comparison be used to assert one country's superiority.[77]

Fundamentally, the motivations for both of these crimes were similar, but the manner in which they were carried out differed dramatically. While each act of terrorism aimed to murder mass numbers of people in order to send a message to the government, the perpetrators were not at all alike. In the United States, Timothy McVeigh acted with

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[76] Lewis, 203.

[77] Obviously, countries do not always live up to the standards of their national character. Even in the cases of the Oklahoma City bombing and the Tokyo subway attacks, the United States and Japan behaved in some ways that conflicted with their ideals. The attacks themselves could be viewed as a breakdown of the nation's idyllic system. This paper chooses to focus on what happens when these model attributes are acted out rather than when they are not, which occurs more frequently.

the help of a few friends but, ultimately, he was the only one who actually carried out the Oklahoma City bombing. On the other hand, five Japanese men were directly accountable for releasing the sarin gas onto the subway cars, but they were directed and assisted by the leadership of the Aum Shinrikyo. If the cult did not exist, these individuals would never have decided to attack the Tokyo subway system. That attack was the work of a group. Even the inspiration behind these acts of violence was not the same. McVeigh hoped to convey that he was disgruntled with the government's actions in regards to fellow members of the militia culture, not to protect anyone else. When members of the Aum assailed the subway with sarin, they were working to save the integrity of the group, believing that the cult could not continue if it did not complete this act to prevent a police search of its compounds.

To understand the significance of a single person actually carrying out the attack compared with a number of people, it is necessary to review the basic principles of America and Japan. Individualism is ingrained into the American people. When carrying out a criminal act, McVeigh did not feel that he could trust a group to assist him in his task. Demonstrating how fundamental individualism is, McVeigh worked essentially alone. In Japan, children are raised to live in a group-oriented society. The majority of the Aum Shinrikyo members joined the cult in order to find a place in a group. Unfortunately, this group used its power to persuade members to act in collaboration to commit an act of terrorism. Viewed from this angle, it only makes sense that an American would work alone while the Japanese would use a number of people to accomplish their goals.

Moreover, Americans and Japanese responded to the victims of these attacks quite differently. In Oklahoma City, volunteers immediately rushed into the ruins of the Murrah Building to attempt to rescue anyone who was still alive, even when they ran the risk of injuring themselves. The main objective was to save as many people as possible from the rubble. Instead of focusing on the injured, the majority of subway riders and passersby in Tokyo did nothing for the people who were lying on the streets in pain. Of course, there were exceptions, like Kiyoka Izumi, who gave her time to assist the people who were hurt to the hospital. For the most part, though, the average person continued on his way rather than help people suffering from sarin poisoning.

On a deeper cultural level, the national characters of these countries can explain these differences. Holding equality as an ideal, most Americans believe that all lives are equally valuable. As a result of that belief, making every effort to get as many of the people trapped in the building out as possible was essential. No one person was more important than another. While the Japanese certainly value life as much as Americans, their sense of duty might have restrained them from helping a stranger. As Benedict noted, the Japanese traditionally feel that assisting someone they do not know can place an unwelcome burden of *giri* on that person. Unless directly asked for help, a Japanese person might not see another person as desiring their aid. During the Tokyo subway attacks, it is doubtful that any Japanese person stood looking at a victim of sarin poisoning and thought about the undesirable effects of assisting a stranger. Nonetheless, since this idea is firmly embedded into the Japanese psyche, though, it is possible that the notion of duty influenced their actions.

Another possible explanation of these divergent behaviors in the two cultures is that in America organizations reacted while it was only individuals who were able to immediately respond to the disaster in Japan. The Red Cross, in addition to police and fire departments, provided the majority of volunteers for the rescue forces. Besides simply having the support of other persons to work alongside an individual, these groups were trained to deal with crises. The American emergency services were equipped to deal with a disaster in many ways that the Japanese were not. As a country, the United States possessed a strong internal structure to deal with emergencies such as the bombing.[78] Also, the attack in Oklahoma City was clearly an explosion, and rescue services could handle an easily identifiable emergency. In Tokyo, the people who were expected to help the injured were simply other Japanese who happened to be in that area when the gas was released. These people who did not help their fellow citizens were ordinary individuals who probably did not know how to aid someone who was convulsing or foaming at the mouth. Passersby did not know that sarin was released in the subway and were not aware of how to help someone suffering from its effects. Responding to Murakami's assertion that the situation was poorly handled, Hacking noted, "[M] any people, indeed the entire system, behaved quite well, even though a great deal of chaos was to be expected."[79] Hacking did not believe that citizens of any other nation would have reacted any differently than the Japanese did that day. More than likely, the individuals who did not help others in Tokyo were merely confused but their innate sense of *giri* could have influenced them to walk past injured strangers.

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[78] In 2005, though, these agencies were not properly prepared to deal with an emergency on the scale of Hurricane Katrina.
[79] Hacking, 8.

After the attacks, the American and Japanese governments behaved differently. Feeling that it was necessary to reassure the public, American government officials appeared soon and often in the media to try to assuage fears of another act of violence against the nation. While some news reports were quick to blame the Middle East extremists for the Oklahoma City bombing and claim support for these accusations from the government, American public officials were truthful about what occurred in Oklahoma and their hopes for what would prevent terrorism from happening in the future. Rather than try to prematurely alleviate the population's worries, the Japanese government focused on apprehending the perpetrators before they appeared in media sources. As a result, the pubic feared for their safety but did not commit violent acts against individuals who were supposedly responsible for the crime. Basically, the Japanese government chose silence over the American government's technique of quickly informing their citizens as a better route in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

Again, the national character of both America and Japan provide possible explanations for these choices in behavior. With freedom of expression as one of the most basic rights for all citizens, Americans, in general, do not find it necessary to withhold any pertinent information. Even if the facts were later proved false, the government and the media could provide the public with whatever particulars they might know and revise their statements later. This reasoning explains why the media was not shy to say that the Oklahoma City bombing was the work of the Middle East. In Japan, though, citizens are well known for their taciturnity. Understanding that many Japanese do not place a high value on verbal communication, the government did not wish to

jeopardize its reputation through broadcasting incorrect information. To remain quiet and gather evidence against the perpetrators seemed like prudent actions in a society that is reserved rather than outspoken.

To fully comprehend the impact of the government's actions, it is necessary to examine how the public reacted to their proceedings. As soon as President Clinton signed the anti-terrorism laws, a fierce debate ensued. Some Americans believed that the Omnibus Antiterrorism Act was too weak while others saw it as stripping away liberties. In the end, not much occurred to actually change the law. On the other hand, the victims' families who hoped to participate in the trials of the perpetrators as impact witnesses were able to make their frustration clear. When the judge informed them that they could not observe the trial and then take part in that same court case as witnesses, these citizens contested this decision. Eventually, their efforts resulted in the Victim Allocution Clarification Act of 1997. This law revised the victim's bill of rights to allow affected individuals to act as witnesses and observers in a criminal trial.[80] What is important from these examples is that American citizens did not hesitate to declare their rights.

Conversely, in Japan, the government either quietly solved or just as quietly ignored mistakes that occurred during the Tokyo subway attack. Throughout his research for *Underground*, Murakami found that "Japan's institutions remain...acutely sensitive to any public 'loss of face,' unwilling to expose their failures to 'outsiders.'"[81] Any efforts to investigate the government's treatment of the terrorist attacks are politely deterred. While the Japanese population probably could have an effect on government policy, they choose not to.

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[80] Linenthal, 104-105.
[81] Murakami, 238.

What could cause such disparity in behavior between these two nations? These reactions go deeper than America's willingness to speak up versus the reserved nature of Japan. In the United States, a love of popular government and individualism seems to be almost second nature. When a citizen feels that he is not receiving the treatment that he deserves, it is only expected that he will use the judicial system to procure a solution that benefits him. Contrasting to this belief is the conviction in Japan that the group is more important than any individual. A Japanese person needs to feel that his litigious actions will benefit the whole group before he is spurred to go to court. Also, lawsuits commonly disrupt harmony, a result which the Japanese firmly oppose. Most Japanese are willing to let some issues slide in order to protect the overall harmony of the nation. A passion for individual rights in America results in a loud protection of these, while the Japanese devotion to achieving group amity culminates in acceptance of their lot.

In spite of the many differences in responses to these terrorist attacks, both the United States and Japan ultimately responded in a similar manner with regard to mental health care. Granted, America did initially provide grief counseling for survivors but these services quickly disappeared as time passed. Those who the Oklahoma City bombing affected psychologically were encouraged to "move on." After the Tokyo subway attack, the Japanese government did little to help the victims cope with their experiences. Both countries were left with citizens who suffered emotionally.

While the end result was the same, the two governments' reasons for failing to address mental health needs were dissimilar. With hard work as a traditional value, American citizens perhaps were expected to help themselves and work through any problems that they might have. Continuing to accept assistance from a psychologist

might have been seen as undesirable because individuals are expected to care for themselves in the United States. On the other hand, the Japanese do not have a problem with supporting other members in their group, but admitting that they are suffering psychologically is a shameful admission. Most Japanese do not want to admit that the sarin attack left a lasting mark on them. Instead of possibly bringing shame to their families through talking with a mental health worker, the Japanese victims prefer to pretend that they are fine. Many of the citizens who rode the subway that day were reluctant even to speak with the novelist Murakami or participate in a survey about their experience after the incident. The American Protestant work ethic and the tradition of a shame culture in Japan quite likely shaped the way these two countries treated mental health care after the terrorist attacks.

Remembering what happened on those fateful days has taken a different form in America and Japan. In Oklahoma City, the memorial process began almost immediately with the chain fence and continues into the present with the museum and the events it sponsors. Creating the permanent memorial was a national affair that took several years to plan and build before it was opened to the public. To this day, Americans still travel to the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum to learn about the events of that day and mourn those who were lost. Memorialization in Tokyo took another route. To be sure, building a memorial on the subway would have proved difficult. But even if such a project had been technically feasible, deeply felt Japanese beliefs would almost certainly have come into play. On the first anniversary of the terrorist attack, the Japanese Prime Minister visited the subway station where the subway officials and families participated in a short ceremony to remember those who died. As time passed, even that small

observance shrank. Now, in Japan, very little attention is paid to the anniversaries of the sarin attacks.[82]

While these dissimilarities in remembering the terrorist attacks do not mean that America grieved the loss of its citizens any more than Japan did, their responses do reveal another important characteristic of both nations. Individualism in the United States has played a key role in the fact the memorialization process. Since the terrorist was an American just like the people that he killed, everyday citizens had to accept that Timothy McVeigh's actions did not reflect on every individual in the United States. They could accept that, while McVeigh was an American, he was not representative of every American. Creating a memorial was acceptable because Americans do not think that the Oklahoma City bombing suggests that the United States is, in any way, immoral.

Identification with a group is one of the cornerstones of Japanese society. While the Japanese certainly possess the ability to discern the acts of an individual versus the deeds of the group, they believe that the manner in which one member behaves reflects on that group as a whole. As a result, since the members of the Aum Shinrikyo were Japanese natives, the sarin gas attacks indicated a problem within Japanese society. If Japanese committed the terrorist act, then the subway attacks are not something to remember. Rather, March 20 should seem to be like any other day. When the Japanese government did not host a major ceremony to remember the victims, they most likely wanted the rest of the world to forget that the Japanese could commit such a horrible crime. Again, the us/them mentality appears as the nation tries to present *tatemae* to outside nations. Choosing to commemorate a domestic terrorist attack does not make

[82] Pangi, 37.

sense in the minds of the Japanese if the country wishes to present a peaceful and harmonious face to the world. This attitude has created what Hacking refers to as "a loss of historical sense."[83] Even though the Aum had caused a crisis through the use of sarin less than a year before in Japan, only one woman that Murakami spoke to recalled this occurrence enough to recognize the signs of a gas attack. Unlike in America, where citizens try to honor the victims through remembrance, the Japanese deliberately try to forget so as not to bring shame to their nation.[84]

Examining the differences in the nation's responses to acts of terrorism provides an interesting study of how national character translates into behavior. While the Oklahoma City bombing and the Tokyo subway attacks were similar in nature (both were domestic acts of terrorism committed in the same year as a message to the government), the perpetrators and the reactions to these events were different. As the public and national governments responded to the attacks, the society's ideals influenced their actions. During this time, it is unlikely that anyone realized that they were behaving in a certain way in part because of the ideals that their culture promoted from a young age, but it is possible to look back and identify where their conduct stemmed from. Reactions to major crisis can reveal certain cultural characteristics.

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[83] Hacking, 16.

[84] This principle only applies to domestic terrorist attacks. Memorials exist at both Hiroshima and Nagasaki because these bombings were the result of another country (the United States) retaliating against Japan.

Conclusion

No generalization is perfect, but looking at the traditional national character of the United States and Japan provides an interesting view of both countries. When faced with a crisis, the Americans and the Japanese reacted differently because of their cultural identities. Despite the fact that societies rarely live out their ideal qualities, both the United States and Japan continue to perpetuate these dissimilar models of living.

As domestic terrorist acts, the Oklahoma City bombing and the Tokyo subway sarin attack could be seen as breakdowns of the idyllic system that the national character of a society creates. Instead, the public's responses in each country to these tragedies revealed how they related to the set of principles that their nation esteems above others. Drawn from the American Dream for the United States and *Nihonjiron* for Japan, these values constitute the nation's identity. When we compare the reactions to these two events, the bombing and the sarin attack, the national character of each country is revealed.

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